

THE IMPULSE TO ABSTRACT: RECENT WORK BY RITZI JACOBI

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Cover photo:
Relief (detail)
1990
Coconut fiber, cotton, and paint
(Cat. 5)

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Foreword Leah Douglas

The University of the Arts is pleased to organize "The Impulse To Abstract: Recent Work by Ritzi Jacobi," which features tapestries, models, collages, and drawings never before seen in North America. Previously known for her collaborative work with Peter Jacobi, this exhibition is of particular significance: It marks Ritzi Jacobi's first solo exhibition in the United States.

Born and educated in Bucharest, Romania, Jacobi has received great recognition throughout Europe for her textiles and sculpture. She has participated in the prestigious Lausanne Biennial of Tapestry (1969-81, 85-89), Venice Biennial (1970), and São Paolo Biennial (1973), and her work is represented in permanent collections in Asia, Europe, and the United States.

From 1961 to 1966, Ritzi Jacobi attended the Institutul de Arte Plastice, in Bucharest, where she studied textiles and was introduced to traditional tapestry techniques. During this time, as she learned of her country's rich textile history, she became inspired by fourteenth— and fifteenth—century Romanian relief embroideries.

Since the late sixties, her innovative tapestries have been characterized as "textile reliefs." Known for their massive scale, exploration of three—dimensional space, abstract surfaces, and use of natural materials and colors, Jacobi's textiles represent a clear break from traditional tapestrymaking.

More than a decade has passed since Jacobi's collaborative work was featured in a retrospective exhibition in the United States, and, since 1981, there has been limited documentation of her work in English. "The Impulse To Abstract," conceived and curated by Warren Seelig, professor of fibers at The University of the Arts, reacquaints an American audience with the textile work of Jacobi and is the first exhibition to consider abstraction and the significance of its relation to contemporary textiles.

The University of the Arts acknowledges the dedication and assistance of Ritzi Jacobi in bringing this extraordinary work to the college and the city of Philadelphia. This project reaffirms the university's commitment to present exhibitions of major contemporary artists that enhance the programs within the college curriculum and enrich Philadelphia's cultural life. I extend my gratitude to Warren Seelig, whose vision and dedication have been essential to the realization of this project. Thanks are also due to Bruce Checefsky, Cleveland Institute of Art; Diana Block, The University of North Texas; and Corky Stuckenbruck, Texas Woman's University, for their institutions' participation in the tour of this exhibition. On behalf of The University of the Arts, I am indebted to the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts for its continuous support of our exhibitions program. The university also acknowledges generous financial support from The Scholler Foundation, Friends of Fiber Art International, and the German Institute for Foreign Affairs.



Ritzi Jacobi working at the loom, 1977.

Michael Dunas, Sarah Bodine

In 1965, with the book *On Weaving*, Anni Albers shared her thoughts on fiber as modern art. In what might be the defining moment of the book, she writes, "If a sculptor deals mainly with volume, an architect with space, a painter with color, then a weaver deals primarily with tactile effects." But what, we ask, makes weaving unique as an expressive medium? Every material, it would seem, has some tactility; there is something we can feel in the iron and glass of modern architecture, the stone and steel of modern sculpture, as well as the drips and splats of modern painting. What does she consider the tactile effects unique to fiber?

Tactility, to Albers, is directly related to what we know of the material's makeup, what we understand by pliability, sponginess, brittleness, porousness—qualities that function as material composition. It is not the commonly perceived sense of touch that we use in recognizing qualities such as roughness or smoothness, the shiny or the dull—qualities that come to us from the surface appearance of the material. You could say that with the surface qualities, your ability to "feel" the material supports what you see, while the structural qualities require that your ability to "feel" supports what you understand. Albers at times characterizes this dichotomy as the aesthetic sensibility and the scientific sensibility: one is receptive, the other analytic; one intuitive, the other intellectual; one subjective, the other objective.

What makes textiles unique for Albers is that the aesthetic sensibility is dependent on the scientific sensibility. You cannot understand one without seeing the other, and you do not really "see" the one without understanding the other. When you look at a textile and perceive color, shapes, line, and even space between the threads, what you are looking at is the consequence of the material's makeup. What we see is not an image that is forced upon the textile but a resolved pattern of physical forces at work within its structural matrix. Each of these textile forces contributes to realizing the whole without an impending need to add something to express or represent the forces at work. The process is one of building up, connecting, assembling various possibilities from the physical evidence of the material, where the goal is to make

the form synonymous with the process. Essentially, then, textiles is a construction, as abstract as anything in art and science, which, nevertheless, elicits an aesthetic response by virtue of its natural harmony, an inner beauty of articulation, constitution, and equilibrium of mental and physical energy.

Looking at it in a more visual way, we could compare Anni Albers's approach to textiles with her husband's approach to painting. Josef Albers, throughout his notable series of formal experiments, varied a procedure, whereby he positioned. for example, a smaller yellow square strategically within, on top of, or in front of—however you wish to look at it—a larger blue square. As a result, a territory of green appeared from the interaction of the colored elements. This green aura, while not physically present, throws viewers into a state of flux between what they know to be true—that is, the reality of the painted squares—and what they see—the appearance of green. The visual effect is, hence, derived from a scientific knowledge of chromatics, yet throughout his extensive series of square paintings, Albers seemed enthusiastically, if not idiosyncratically, preoccupied. With a rational approach to painting, and using clear, concise colored forms, simple geometry, and calculated composition, Albers managed to dazzle the viewer's eyes with a multitude of illusions that are aesthetic as well as scientific by virtue of his personal as well as philosophical involvement in the process. Modern painting, in this way, and in large part because of Albers, focuses on the reality of paint and format to set itself apart from the pictorial dependency of past paintings. Similarly, modern architecture searches for new materials to render its

construction as aesthetically important as its ornament, for which it was judged in the past. But modern textile alone, in its effort to distance itself from its own past, makes the constructive process drive the aesthetic without need to reconcile the necessities of building with the decorative treatment, without conflict of image and support, since the fascination of the medium is that its illusion is its reality and that its reality is its illusion.

Ritzi Gavrila was born in Bucharest, Romania. She studied textiles at the Institutul de Arte Plastice, where she met Peter Jacobi, then a sculpture student. In 1966, they married, and by the early seventies, they had produced a notable body of collaborative textile works. In the beginning, their large, abstract objects often took the form of installations, where imagery was kept to a minimum but tactile qualities were allowed free reign. The Jacobis' first critical attention came at the 1971 Lausanne Biennial of Tapestry for a piece entitled Armoire—an installation of steel armatures resembling commercial coatracks, upon which hung woven forms that hinted at clothing. The hair-suit type of objects were human scale, partially of goat hair, and casually disposed on the racks, almost as though objets trouvés; however, the material itself—its uneven texture and color and distended proportions—was enough to suggest primitive, rural, almost tribal communities and customs, like those of Transilvania, often mentioned as a source for the piece.

Soon after, Ritzi Jacobi's own *Softdrawings* began to bear a relationship to a number of material—and process—based works that had started to make an impact on the art world in the late sixties. In what is often called postminimalism, or "eccentric abstraction," sculptors working under this conceptual umbrella accepted minimalism's emotional constraint, matter—of—fact worldliness, material concreteness, and formal

simplicity, with the reservation that they could not and would not deny material's ability to be expressive by virtue of its tactility. These sensualists, these soft minimalists believed that the fact of the material, its information, its reality was not devoid of intrinsic feeling, as often claimed by their hard-core predecessors. They held out for a body ego at work, a near—visceral identification with how the material causes associations in the viewer's mind. It is as if "indirect sensations of identification" get the viewer caught up in the rhythms or "feel" of the way the form connects with personal memory. Many, like Robert Morris, Eva Hesse, and Jackie Winsor, chose to utilize textiles such as cloth, felt, and rope to carry the full impact of these eccentricities—visual, tactile, visceral.

Where Ritzi Jacobi enters this dialogue of material-based sculpture is in her apparent ability to foresee the associations engendered by the process. The minimalism of Jacobi's forms appeals to an analytic sensibility, keeping imagery, especially traditional tapestry images, out of the mind of the viewer and keeping shape to an almost casual nondescription —a lump of material, a ball of thread, a limp rag. This prepares the viewer to see the maker's decisions and material patterns as an analog of critical inquiry—in effect, turning an analytic strategy into one of empathy. Eva Hesse's work is visually similar, leaving the viewer with an "image" of struggle and passion with material as trace, but a fiber artist like Jacobi more forcefully upholds minimalism's sense of objectivity and distance because the work's facticity dissolves into questions of "How" and "What." These, then, refer back to the aspect of tactility made important by the maker's handling of generative principles. In the dialogue between viewer and work, there is no point that rests on a pure visceral reaction. The viewer is constantly interrupted by the "knowledge" of the transformation that the material has gone through to reach the maker's visual conclusion.

A 1977 photo of Ritzi Jacobi shows her, as though caught by surprise, working at the loom. She sits on a low stool, dwarfed by an enormous diaphanous wall of upright warp threads. Strewn about the floor all around her are bundles of fibrous materials. Some are gathered like stalks of wheat, some are coiled and snaked like towing cables, some are chopped like firewood, and some are loosely rolled balls of yarn that have come to rest amid the chaos. The scene is a storehouse of component parts already formed and gestured,

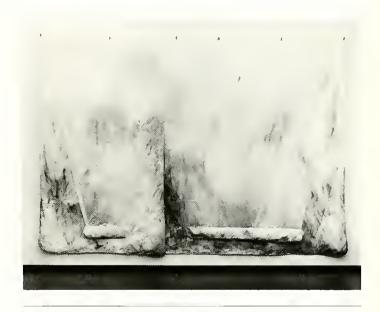
already full of emotional working but without real purpose. It is almost as if a Paul Klee painting has been deconstructed, with the marvelous lines and dots and animated geometries rendered limp by their removal from the context of the picture. In the photo, Jacobi is seen choosing from among these bundles and "inserting" them into the wall of the loom, at once constructing the wall from the building blocks of these preformed structural elements and, at the same time, establishing the visual pattern of their relationship that will foretell the theme of the piece.

In an earlier catalog of their work, the Jacobis wrote: "In our textile work we have made a series of technical inventions which do not exist on their own, but as a part of the whole. Even though we redefine the basic qualities of the materials and processes we use, this is not the primary intention of our work. For instance, incorporating a textile cable in the weaving occurs in a single action and allows for extraordinary growth; the surface develops in a manner quite different from the usual meticulous, slow method of weaving. The cable is like a drawn gesture in weaving; sometimes an actual drawing even becomes part of the whole textile composition."²

During this period, the Jacobis were drawing with textiles over the surface of the warp. This was a different kind of intervention into traditional tapestry, a process that parallels some of the textile work of the fifties and sixties, especially that of the Eastern European expressionists, whose emotionally charged tapestries of raw materials used fiber violently, almost uncontrollably, as twisted and gnarled protrusions—a cacophony of gestural strokes. But in the eighties, the Jacobis were more controlled, more content to build the gesture from known elements rather than to wait for a spontaneous moment. Closer to home may be the drawings of Joseph Beuys, who used the soft mediums of felt, fat, and chalk as

conduits for a plan of action rather than an emotional release. When looking back again to the photo of Ritzi at the loom, it is less like the peripatetic Pollock pouring himself onto the canvas than the sly Beuys at the blackboard, plotting art's intervention in the social condition.

The key to the approach lies in the *Softdrawings* and the *Little Objects* series, both of which were combinations of fiber and paper. In the *Little Objects*, the paper is crinkled and bent to form small, abstract organic forms, while in the *Softdrawings* sheets of graphite—marred rice paper are glued together, then layered. In the drawings, the rice paper has a fiberlike quality, its texture and dimensionality augmented by the graphite as a kind of rubbing or stain. The draping, folding, and layering of the paper are signs of the process frozen in time, the piece pulled by gravity, giving weight to the resistance of the textile structure against the force of nature. The concreteness experienced in handling the material stops you cold, confronting your ability to "feel" the



Etude VII (Softdrawing)
1976
Graphite on rice paper mounted on paper
240 X 340 X 12 cm
(94 1/2" X 133 7/8" X 4 3/4")
Collection of Robert Häusser

abstract properties of tactility. As Erika Billeter noted in her essay "The Art of the Jacobis," "Thus, various techniques and materials—each precisely understood—come together in a single work, informed and complex like an orchestration of a piece of music with scores for different instruments. The attitude of the entire work is successfully covered by means of a single artistic idea." The feeling one gets from these Softdrawings is similar to seeing a dirty rag—something that is an imprint of something else, something that was used in a



Softdrawing 1980 Graphite on rice paper 240 x 140 x 20 cm (94 1/2" x 55" x 7 7/8")

process but was not necessarily the end product of that process. The result is like Billeter's analogy to music—once removed, abstracted from something more concrete. This is what gives meaning to the *Softdrawing*, as patterns of thought revealed indirectly. There is no evidence of a strong graphic representation but, rather, a field of action, witnessed by the composition of the materials—the folds, edges, drapes, spaces between the plies and, especially, the small rice pieces embedded in the paper. The graphite acts to highlight the physical forces at work, leaving a road sign to what we know exists but really cannot see. The soft characterization of these drawings seems to coax from the viewer a kind of outmoded "haptic" ability of the mind and nervous system.

Physical forces like these have played an essential role for Jacobi since the late seventies. One device in particular, central to her recent work, is her use of Schraffuren, or hachures. Technically, hachures relate to contour drawing for geologic surveys, in which parallel lines drawn on a map are used to indicate relief features, the width and breadth of the lines indicating slopes, plains, or plateaus. In art, there is an analogous situation, in which every student learns the elemental technique of hatching, or cross—hatching, to create contours of the body with areas of light and shade.

As early as 1978, Jacobi was making large tapestries, such as *White Exotica*, composed of what looks like a patterned hatching using wrapped bundles of goat hair, cotton, and coconut fiber as the short, dimensional strokes. Looking back, even to the earlier tapestries of the *Transilvania* series (such as the one pictured in the photo of Ritzi at the loom), what seemed in the early seventies like random threadlines makes more sense as a topographical index, as a contoured land-scape. The emotional transcription using the hachures evokes a romantic response to a specific place and time, like the

earlier Armoire. The place is the same —Transilvania—but the method of recollection is different. The attachment to texture, contour, surface, and pattern is there, but gone are the clothing suggestions in favor of a more abstracted connection to body and land, an exaggerated or attenuated physical map that suggests an incipient earthy tactility.

In her charcoal drawings of the eighties, the force of the hachures becomes physical, even environmental. As Werner Meyer describes in his 1991 catalog essay, "This obstinacy of drawing and sculpture in Ritzi Jacobi's work is fundamentally supported by the choice of material: charcoal on paper radiates as much imagination in the contour as it has in the consistency of the line and surface form. The sculptures are dominated both by the layers or single steel plates and by the materiality or coats of paint and varnish. Nevertheless the sculptures are determined by the character of the drawings as a result of creating abstractions from the concreteness of the basic material."

The gestural strokes of the charcoal on paper—bold, forceful, each one distinct and independent—seem to enlarge the space of the paper, physically bursting out into the environment of the room, with the greatest effect achieved in those pieces that use wood and steel as real materials to extend the charcoal lines into a third dimension. These charcoal constructions are a continuation of the directional forces, once imbedded in the rice paper and later contained by the bundles of cotton and sisal in a schematic rendering of the forces themselves, further removed from the woven or topographic plane.

You can see even more clearly the relationship of the charcoal drawing to earlier fiber work when motifs like the rolling balls—Untitled, 1991 (cat. 19) and Untitled, 1991 (cat. 20)—remind us of the earlier photograph of Ritzi at the loom, where independent elements had specific meaning even before their incorporation into a larger composition. To further this idea of the integrity of each element, the balls may also be seen as the butt ends of the wrapped lengths of fiber, sometimes floating within the mass of tapestry, sometimes hovering on its surface, so that in the drawings we find ourselves moving three—dimensionally around the work as though it were a sculpture in space. The continuity of Jacobi's work lies in the ability to recreate the analogies of tactility into a physically more encompassing terrain, incorporating

more of what we know to be true and real in the world as the underlying sensibility of our aesthetic.

In Jacobi's two most recent constructions—Fly South and Monocline, both from 1993 (the latter, literally translated, means "mineral crystallization from a storm")—there is a return to textile patterns using hatching with fiber bundles. This occurred after a hiatus in the eighties, when her work focused on a body of environmental sculptures, most made of stacked aluminum or steel planes, culminating in the major commission Aluminum Schraffur (Aluminum Hachure). But, as Meyer noted at the time, even the drawings were obstinate as a medium to Jacobi's process; they were, to her nature, the reality principle, the checks and balances that keep her rooted in the inevitable scientific sensibility, the fact of tactility that distinguishes a textile way of working.

What seems to be at work in these hachures with steel and aluminum, which led up to Fly South and Monocline, is an isolation of the component parts, a deconstruction of sorts that returns to the point of Jacobi's recurrent theme—the forces that build a textile image. The cold and almost clinical aspect of her handling of steel and aluminum belies the insistence of an emotional, expressionist surface that has been seen in the past, both in the early tapestries and charcoal drawings. What she is determined to work through is what is beneath the surface—the question of, What is the truth upon which we build the appearance? and, more important, What is the reality with which we must work to forge a credible practice, both in life and in art?

In both *Monocline* and *Fly South*, the surface, as we have known it in her previous textile compositions, is virtually lost. Jacobi has ostensibly broken through the perception of soft and has made palpable the inner tactile qualities of absorption

and contraction of dynamic structural elements that penetrate more deeply into the inner workings of the piece. They are all open-ended, in the manner of sketches and drawings used to illustrate an idea or discovery that has reached a significant stage but promises more than it shows. The hachures keep seeking a terrain that Jacobi knows is there but is not readily seen, that is felt but does not necessarily have any visible means of access. And although these are still drawings, works in progress, maybe that is all that can be accomplished when the goal is to get at the inner workings of things, to get at reality in its raw inception. It almost seemed that way with Anni Albers's work toward the end, a kind of introspective struggle with how intuition is in constant battle with the "known" of textiles. But the struggle is somehow encouraging to watch—to see the structure become that expressive within the bounds of a material and technological virtuosity. With these two pieces, there is greater hope that we can see through the barrier of surface qualities, of cosmetic appearance, to a more authentic reconstruction of a sense that is primal and essential—the tactile.

Lucy Lippard, Changing: Essays in Art Criticism (New York: Dutton, 1971), 102.

Ritzi and Peter Jacobi, exhibition catalog (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1981)

3 Erika Billeter, Ibid., 14.

Werner Meyer, Rıtzi Jacobi, Sculpturen und Zeichnungen (Germany: Rıtzi Jacobi, 1991), 1.



White Exotica
1978
Cotton, goat hair, and sisal
300 x 280 x 10 cm
(118" x 110 1/4" x 4")
Collection of The Detroit Institute of Arts

WARREN SEELIG

The impulse to abstract may be the most powerful and pervasive motivation to form, not only for Romanian—born sculptor and textile artist Ritzi Jacobi but for the work of many associated with the contemporary fiber medium. In fact, the primary impetus for organizing this exhibition was, first, to explore this idea and, then, to consider artists who would best illuminate it. Jacobi was clearly a first choice, because of the relationship of her work to the concept and because of her position, since the early seventies, as one of the very few whose artmaking has helped ground and establish an identity for contemporary fiber.

Jacobi's approach has always been through abstraction, where she upholds the supremacy of form over narrative. As an artist, she works impulsively, out of a primal attraction and compelling need to fabricate, to build, to materialize form through personal invention. Abstraction is a phenomenon we must examine to understand the way form occurs, not only in the work of Jacobi but in much of contemporary fiber and textile. It is not limited to textiles but it is tied to various media where there exists an essential attraction and overwhelming need to work with materials. It is seen in the work of painters who "coat" their canvases with layers of paint, then scratch through the colored skin to the interstices in the cloth beneath, or in draftsmen who are conscious of the feel of graphite pushing into paper as a line goes thick and thin—artists who feel passionately about the physical world, who connect and find some bearing through contact with substance and the elemental.

The impulse to abstract is something alive, emanating from within the artist, not merely part of a historical theme in the orderly sequence of Western art history. The focus in this exhibition is on abstraction as it relates to behavior—as an observable activity inherent in us all. It presupposes a certain intimacy with materials, and it requires manual labor. It draws on bodily intelligence. The need to discover must be so strong that we are able, at times, to short—circuit the intellect and place more trust in the intuitive. The impulse is in direct contrast to the need to imitate. Imitation is much more highly regarded in our culture, for the product can often

be understood. It provides a picture that is clear, rational, and verifiable; it is a linear process, connected with learning, training, and achievement. The need to abstract involves all the senses, especially touch, and the product of this behavior is considerably less tangible.

Materials provoke and initiate the impulse to abstract. The painter Antoni Tápies said, "Material is our external reality and would have no existence of its own except as a projection of our reason or our psyche." For many artists, materials not only possess profound qualities that affect us subliminally but are also loaded with associations derived from our common experience. Whether processed, synthetic, natural, or raw, materials lead the way to a complex arena of cultural discovery. Even their names possess a strong cultural resonance—polyester, silk, porcelain, pine, oak, platinum, tin—instantly conjuring up images of objects and experiences. Over time, we react more intimately to the material, and often in an exaggerated fashion. It is the stuff, its materiality, the succulent, pliable, plastic, soft, hard, malleable, diaphanous, translucent, shiny, oily, glittery materials that instigate, bewitch, and tempt us. Our initial response is to their physicality, their sensuousness; it is mostly instinctive, intuitive. We are not drawn to materials because we have figured out or rationalized our need for them; the attraction resides elsewhere. Rarely do we get so close to reality without imitation or representation—in other words, we gain a more immediate sense of the real world through abstraction.

Many working with contemporary textile and fiber, select materials, perhaps, because of the way that they offer clues about form yet to be visualized. Understanding this concept may reveal something about the creative process. It is possible that materials and their consequential transformation may be the first stage in the search for an idea. Materials suggest ideas because of their inherent physical properties and, more important, because of the way they seem to contain or absorb unique information. The information is not necessarily universal; we read and respond in our own personal, and peculiar, ways. In fact, the way we respond may give expression to a rich and eccentric experience of the world. To make form that responds only to a material's physical properties to what it can do rather than what it encourages us to do more often produces results that are predictable and familiar. The artist's ability to discover qualities in materials that go beyond their scientific properties will result in form with far greater expression. Some artists are unusually willing to allow materials to play a significant role in the discovery of form; it is the essential and limitless source of inspiration for those who are material-oriented. The belief that the source of ideas may exist within material often contradicts established thinking in Western art, that material is a cru e resource to be exploited, to be overcome by the will of the artistcreator—merely the stuff that bears the imprint of the artist's style and technique. Materials actually contain clues that allow us to discover our own personal reality through a subconscious process, an intuitive, creative journey, of which material is an active partner.

Jacobi experiences a deep empathy with material, but this is in tandem with a near-physiological dependence on process—that is, process in her work is not simply the means to an end. To the contrary, process is an element that is externalized and made visible as part of the surface. This is

true not only in the deep relief surfaces of bound stubble penetrating the ground of the tapestry cloth, as in the earlier works, such as the Romanica series, 1978-80, but in the softly blistered goat hair and cotton surface of the magnificent tapestry La Derniere de Cette Serie, 1986-87. The intensity in the composition of surface detail—every blemish and pore is considered over hundreds of square feet—is accomplished over a period that may last up to a year. Her obsession with constructing surface is irrational nearly beyond comprehension—but, then, it is ultimately insignificant compared to the consequence. The resultant surface reveals the process as though the energy and vitality of the maker were absorbed into the cloth. The soft, sagging skin is convincing and alive, with its blistered and furrowed surface spread across the monumental textile plane. This supple mass of cloth lifts up in the center, creating a bipartite form with softly flaring appendages.

La Derniere de Cette Serie may be the culmination—and the masterpiece—in a long series of works that include suspended tapestries, freestanding sculptural tapestry, and Softdrawings, all utilizing surfaces and forms that are deeply informed by certain organic-growth phenomena. It was Ritzi Jacobi, often in collaboration with Peter Jacobi, in the late sixties, who was among the earliest to explore the great expressive potential of tapestry and textile as a medium for the creation of powerful and convincing sculpture. These were forms new to the art world, created by artists who simply could not find the satisfaction of surface and structural organic-connectedness in painting or traditional sculptural processes. The assemblage of elements, especially in the tapestries, was masterful as various sizes of rootlike elements seemed to accumulate naturally or condense around breaks in the periphery, or create a dense growth in patches between the flat, barren tapestry skin. Jacobi's sensuous Softdrawings were lifelike: The flat, translucent flaps and appendages hung low and gently swelled with graphite stain permeating crevices and edges.

The next monumental construction, *Relief*, 1989 (cat. 4), and the smaller *Relief*, 1990 (cat. 5), along with the subsequent constructions, *Fly South*, 1993, and *Monocline*, 1993, reveal a dramatic shift in approach. Not only are these recent works far more reductive and anonymous, they seem to

engage forces other than the organic. *Relief* is a large field, more like a suspended wall, with a softly shifting, vertically grained surface that runs from the ragged bottom edge fifteen feet up to the top. This nontapestry surface is constructed of shingled, wrapped bundles attached on the same plane. Situated diagonally and in countermovement to the ground are several hundred bundled "bricks" that seem to be held in position by some kind of magnetic force. This schematic surface mesmerizes the viewer as the "bricks" float and change in size from the lower right to upper left.

Fly South and Relief further establish Jacobi's departure from biologically derived surfaces to ones more akin to physics and the physical forces surrounding us all. The surfaces on both works are highly charged; they exude an energy whose source comes from within. In Fly South, the consistently scaled bundles of wrapped hemp—painted white and black, and natural—are effervescent, for the three shaded elements seem to keep the energy mixture in flux. Not only does the ten—inch thickness dramatically reinforce its physicality but the differentiated surface elements draw one deeply into the ground. Fly South and Relief may not be textile in a technical sense; they are constructions, but they are deeply influenced by the spirit of weaving and clothmaking. Both are volatile surfaces, made of hundreds upon thousands of particles that construct to create a whole.

The size of *Monocline*, one of Jacobi's most recent fiber constructions, is not unusual for Jacobi, its surface scale is massive. "Chains" of thick, cotton—wrapped, white and black hemp tubes are bolted together, then folded and intertwined among themselves. The result is a deep, open, exaggerated surface—in a sense, a magnification of *Fly South*. The surface mass of *Monocline* becomes both the object and the focus of this work. It is as if the surface is now the sculpture.

For Jacobi, drawing is primarily a way of thinking sculpturally, and often the acts of drawing and making sculpture come very close to being the same. The hachures (hatched lines) in a number of drawings are thick, dense lines of charcoal, pressed by hand, side by side, onto the paper to form planes. Sometimes these planes appear to be "materialized," as if they could be skinned off the paper surface. Untitled, 1988 (cat. 16), is a large drawing of subtly translucent, black, overlapping hachure planes on paper. Three black posts lean against the drawing—two against the side, one on the edge. The physicality of the posts reinforces the feeling that the drawing is an entity, separate from the paper. Yet, at the same time, the black posts become part of the drawing, extending it into three-dimensional space. The "building" of the hachure drawings is not unlike the construction of a textile plane, in the accumulation of lines as sedimentary layering. The plane remains porous as the lines amass, allowing light, or whiteness, to pass through the interstices of the drawing. Untitled (Collage), 1992 (cat. 29), is another drawing-collage with strong sculptural connotations; the perforated cardboard template becomes the thick, physical half, or real side, of the work, and the equidistant peppered marks become the illusionary half. One is drawn to the marks by way of the perforated object. In this piece even the process of making the drawing is shared, as we can imagine pushing the graphite pencil through each small hole in the cardboard's matrix.

Entwurfszeichnung II, 1985 (cat. 14), is a drawing made, in part, by dragging fragmented particles of charcoal across the paper surface with a ruler. Traces of etched lines are pushed and scratched into the ground, with the act of making the drawing clearly documented on the surface. In this drawing, Jacobi reveals her uncanny ability to create surfaces that seem to have occurred through the effect of natural

erosionary forces and not through a more self—conscious rendering of line and texture. In *Entwurfszeichnung II*, disparate and fragmented shapes act as stabilizing marks that hold the rich, hazy field in position.

A pair of black circle drawings, Untitled, 1991 (cat. 19), and Untitled, 1991 (cat. 20), play off one another beautifully as opposite moods are created through the placement of simple shapes in space. The first drawing shows three charged circles that may be in suspended animation or have an affinity for one another; the surrounding field of energy also causes them to remain in position. Present here is a satisfying equilibrium, whereas the second drawing creates an uncomfortable tension in the off-balance composition of the same black circles. Once again, much of Jacobi's postorganic work, accomplished since 1987, shows a fascination with physical forces, including weight, gravity, balance, magnetism, etc. The drawing of white chalk on sandpaper squares, Balance, 1991 (cat. 10), is another way in which we view this phenomenon. That balancing act, however, occurs in the context of a rich visual ground of fragmented light surrounding the sandy, luminous squares.

A number of drawings and collages in this exhibition refer either to works that have since been made or pieces that may come in the future. Untitled, 1992 (cat. 27), is an example of a drawing for a work using multilayered mesh screening, and Untitled, 1991 (cat. 21), is a collage that fantasizes about the possibility of building a work that towers over an industrial tank (shown in scale). These are not intended as literal illustrations of an idea—rather, they reveal a part of the thought process Jacobi utilizes in the development of her work. Ultimately, these drawings remain a fascinating mystery, a cryptic notation about what is yet to be realized.

For Ritzi Jacobi, building models or maquettes is also a way of materializing ideas on form. Often unrefined, direct, and spontaneous, models such as Big Balance, 1991, speak eloquently, without, at times, any need to go further. Big Balance shows the lyrical movement of the soft, multistranded paper line cavorting around an aluminum T-bar. This hard and straight frame not only supports the erratic, segmented line but tempers its movement and gives meaning to the opposite quality of the hard metal—an excellent example of how the artist integrates drawing with sculpture, showing the line with real substance and dimension. Aluminum Schraffur is another maquette, built around 1986, of cardboard and wood stacks, piled up and leaning precariously. This crude but effective model offers only a glimpse of an idea, a catalyst for a sculpture later fabricated at a Daimler-Benz factory near Stuttgart, Germany. A dramatic transformation occurred as the rough cardboard and wood became a compilation of solid aluminum planks standing more than eight feet tall.

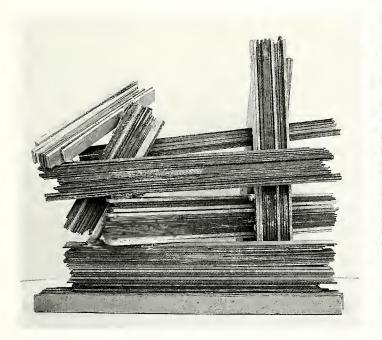
The contrast between model and finished work offers insight into Jacobi's approach. Her maquettes and drawings provide a quick, rudimentary look at certain basic qualities we see in a final work. She does not develop a specific plan, nor does she diagram the work in advance to be meticulously executed later. Models and drawings vaguely document ideas about future works and give only a few, illusive clues. Relief, a model in the form of a collage, gives only a rough indication of the floating-brick formation in the tapestry Relief. The double drawing, Untitled (Drawing for Relief), 1989 (cat. 17), is a quick, gestural rendering of the rhythmic surface grain (lower) and placement of the collective floating-brick bundles. It is fascinating to observe that models and maquettes and drawings are often fleeting, thumbnail sketches for monumental and labor-intensive works. Ultimately, from these vague documents emerges the real, live work. In fact, the decisions that give spirit to form are made by Jacobi in the studio during the physical process of handbuilding, shaping, and constructing.

Seeing and experiencing the work of Ritzi Jacobi provides us with sustenance and balance in the face of a culture that increasingly is distancing itself from touch, materiality, and the world of the physical. Much of our experience is second- and thirdhand; we are becoming passive participants via the window of television and electronic interactive hyper—

media. Verbal communication is emanating more from the screen and through various electronic conduits, eliminating personal, face—to—face involvement. Jacobi makes work that gives us a sense of bearing and substantial connection to the world, work in which expression comes directly out of materials and ultimately transcends the theoretical. It is an art in which the motivation to form emerges from handling, shaping, and constructing as the artist gets deeper under our skin, coming closer to the soul than to the intellect. It is ironic that the most material, the most tangible work proves the least explainable.

Jacobi neither mimics the overly cynical world nor does she proselytize, politicize, or propagandize, or laden us with text. She gives us an art in which an authentic spiritual element is tied to the transformation that occurs when ordinary materials assume extraordinary form. In his book Abstraction and Empathy, Wilhelm Worringer wrote, in 1908, "The urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world." We respond to Jacobi, as well as others guided by this phenomena, in a manner not unlike the way primitive peoples shielded and protected their psyches from what Worringer referred to as "the prevailing caprice of the organic." In this hyperpostmodernist period, we also need to protect our psyches—from the bland electronic haze slowly permeating every aspect of our existence. The impulse to abstract is an instinctive behavior experienced by many artists, in all media, that leads to the discovery of what lies within: the fantastic, the eccentric, and yes, the sublime.

¹ Victória Combalia Dexeus, Tápies (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 16.





Aluminum Schraffur (model) 1986 Cardboard and wood

Aluminum Schraffur (final project) 1987 Aluminum 2.60 x 3.60 x 1.00 m (8'6" x 11'10" x 3'3 3/8")



La Derniere de Cette Serie (detail)



La Derniere de Cette Serie 1987 Goat hair



Relief 1989 Coconut fiber and cotton (Cat. 4)



Relief
1990
Coconut fiber, cotton, and paint
(Cat. 5)



Monocline 1993 Coconut fiber, cotton, and paint



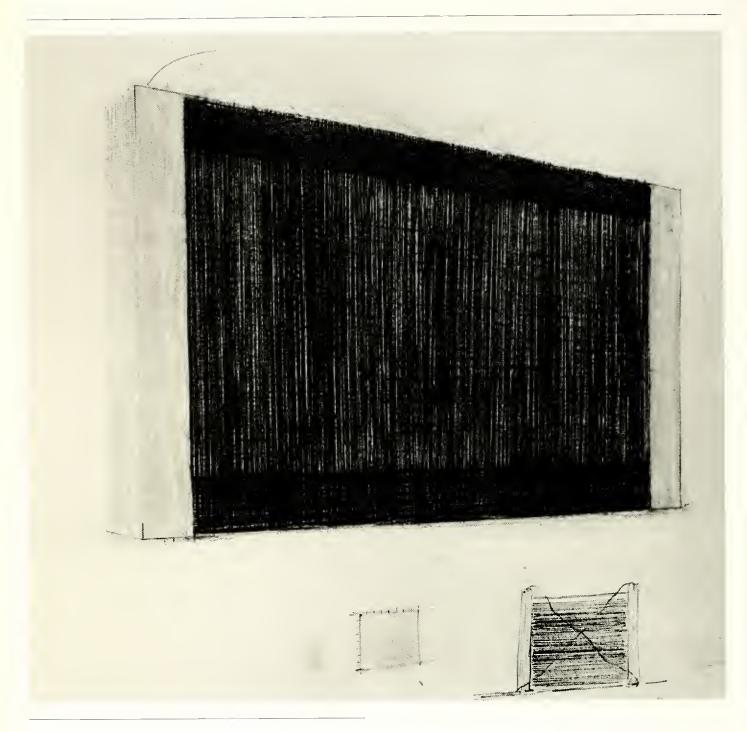
Fly South
1993
Coconut fiber, cotton, and paint
Collection of Landesmuseum Karlsruhe, Germany



Untitled 1988 Charcoal on paper with plastic rods (Cat. 16)



Big Balance 1991 Aluminum and paper



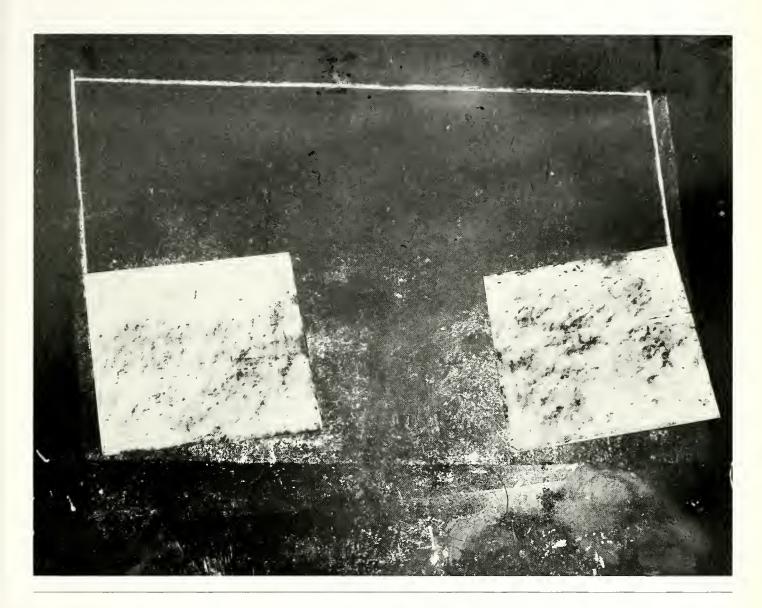
Untitled 1992 Charcoal on paper (Cat. 27)



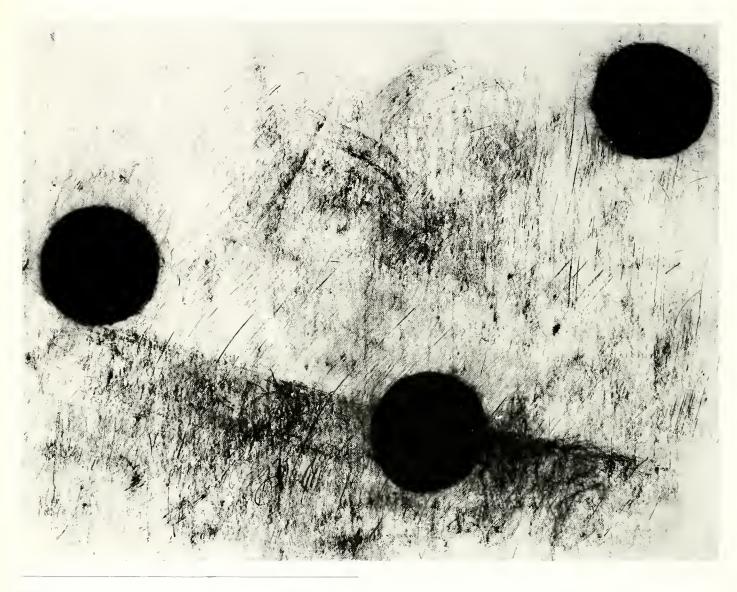
Untitled (collage) 1991 Paper and graphite (Cat. 21)



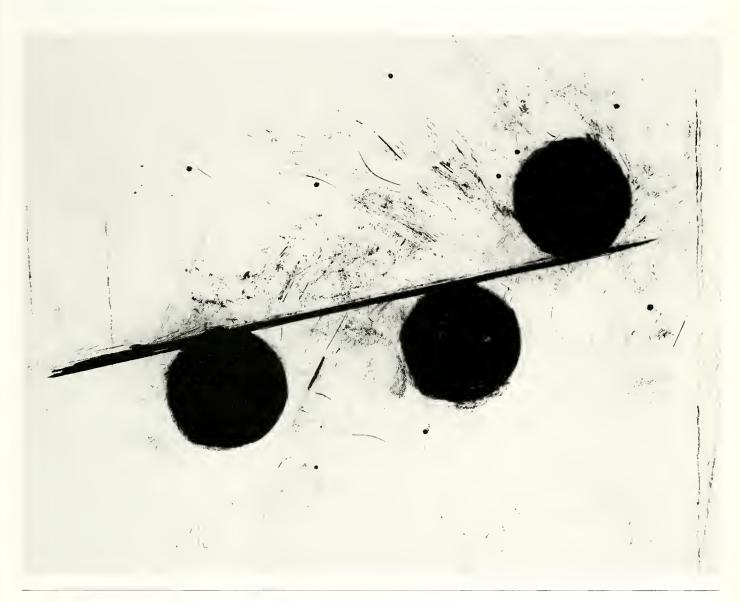
Entwurfszeichnung II 1985 Charcoal on paper (Cat. 14)



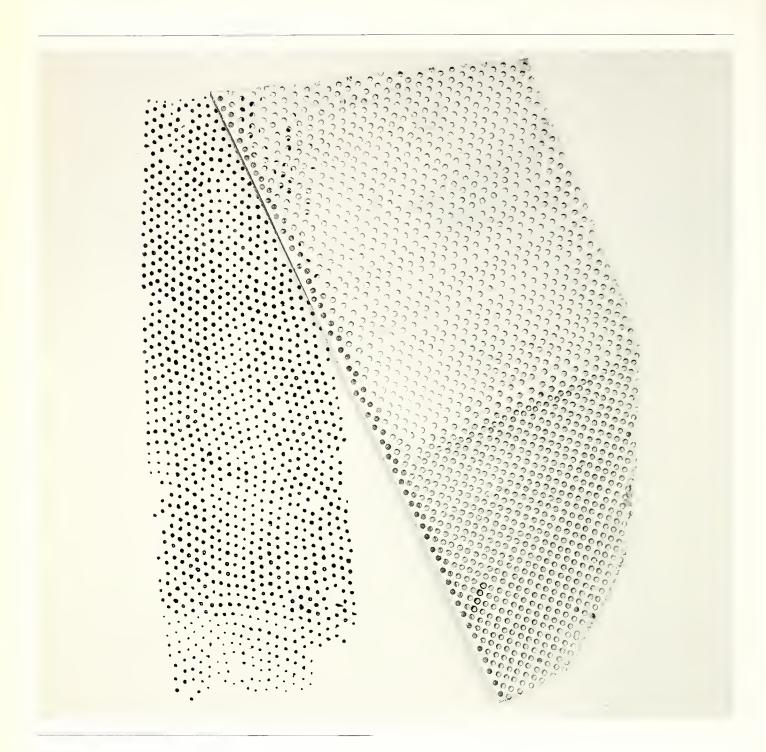
Balance 1991 Charcoal, sandpaper, and acrylic on cardboard (Cat. 10)



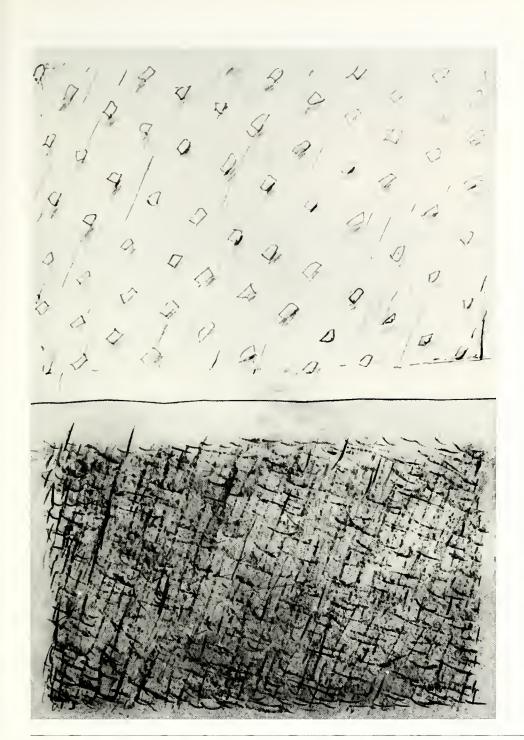
Untitled 1991 Charcoal on paper (Cat. 19)



Untitled 1991 Charcoal on paper (Cat. 20)



Untitled (collage) 1992 Charcoal and cardboard (Cat. 29)



Untitled (drawing for *Relief*) 1989 Graphite on paper (Cat. 17)



Untitled (collage) 1991 Paper and graphite (Cat. 31)

Ritzi Jacobi

Biography

1941

Born in Bucharest, Romania

1961-66

Studies at the Institutul de Arte Plastice, Bucharest, Romania

1967

Fabricates first abstract textile relief, White Textile Relief

Textiles were signed by both Ritzi Jacobi and Peter Jacobi from 1967 to 1984

1970

Moves to Germany and granted citizenship

1971

Begins series of Softdrawings, signed by both Ritzi Jacobi and Peter Jacobi from 1971 to 1976

1973

Receives the Art and Communication Award, São Paolo Biennial, Brazil

Transilvania I, first textile which integrates drawing

1974

Receives the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award, New York

1978

Romanica tapestry series

1979

Germanica tapestry series

1980

Begins to integrate other materials such as paper, cardboard, fiber, and stones, into three—dimensional work

1982-85

Works on installations: Shadows, Work in Progress, and Drawings on Three-dimensional Hatching

1986

Begins to develop large metal sculpture

1987

Aluminum Schraffur fabricated by Daimler-Benz,

Mannheim, Germany

La Derniere de Cette Serie, major textile work using traditional weaving techniques

Relief, major textile using a montage technique

1990-94

1989

Works simultaneously on projects in textile and metal

Selected Public and Private Collections

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

BASF, Ludwigshafen, Germany

Banco di Napoli, New York

Daimler-Benz, Mannheim, Germany

The Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan

Dreyfuss Corporation, New York

Landesmuseum Karlsruhe, Germany

Landesmuseum, Stuttgart, Germany

Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland

Musee d'art Decoratif Lausanne, Switzerland

Musee d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France

Museum Bellerive, Zurich, Switzerland

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany

Museum für Kunsthandwerk, Frankfurt, Germany

Museum für Moderne Kunst, Freiburg, Germany

National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan

Nordjyllands Kunstmuseum, Aalborg, Denmark

Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany

Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Ulmer Museum, Ulm, Germany

Selected Solo Exhibitions (partially with Peter Jacobi)

* indicates catalog or brochure

1970

Museen der Stadt, Regensburg, Germany

1975

"Ritzi and Peter Jacobi," Kunst und Kunstgewerbeverein, Pforzheim, Germany *

1976

"Tapisserien, Textile Reliefs und Objekte— Soft Zeichnungen und Skulpturen," Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, Germany *

1977

"Ritzi and Peter Jacobi: Tapisserien, Textile Reliefs und Objekte—Soft Zeichnungen und Skulpturen," Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden–Baden, Gesellschaft der Freunde Junger Kunst, Baden–Baden, Germany *

1978

"Textile Reliefs und Softzeichnungen," Museum Bellerive, Zurich, Switzerland *

1980

"Ritzi and Peter Jacobi: Tapestries and Soft Drawings," Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; and Coventry Gallery, Sydney, Australia *

"Ritzi and Peter Jacobi,"

s'Hertogenbosch, Kruithuis, Netherlands *

1981

"Ritzi & Peter Jacobi,"
The Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan;
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois;
Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, and Philadelphia College
of Art (now The University of the Arts), Pennsylvania;
and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California *

"Ritzi Jacobi: Works in Progress," Museum der Stadt Aschaffenburg, Germany *

1982

"Ritzi Jacobi—Peter Jacobi," Nordjyllands Kunstmuseum, Aalborg, Denmark *

"Skulpturum," Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden *

1984

"Ritzi Jacobi: Dessins, Sculptures, Tapisseries/ Peter Jacobi: Photos, Sculptures, Tapisseries," Musee d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Galerie nationale d'art textile, Beauvais, France *

1985

"Tapisserien, Skulpturen, Zeichnungen und Fotografien," BASF, Ludwigshafen, Germany*

1989

"Ritzi Jacobi," Galerie Patrick Roy, Lausanne, Switzerland *

1990

"Skulpturen und Zeichnungen," Mercedes–Benz, Mannheim, Germany *

1993

"Drawings," Regierungspräsidium Karlsruhe, Germany

1994

"The Impulse To Abstract: Recent Work by Ritzi Jacohi," Rosenwald–Wolf Gallery, The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; The Fine Arts Gallery, Texas Woman's University and The University of North Texas Art Gallery, Denton; and Reinberger Galleries, Cleveland Institute of Art, Ohio *



Ritzi Jacobi, 1993

Selected Group Exhibitions

1969

"4th International Biennial of Tapestry,"
Musée Cantonal des Beaux–Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland *

1970

"La Biennale di Venezia," Venice, Italy *

1971

"Deliberate Entanglements,"

Wight Art Gallery, University of California at Los Angeles; California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois; Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City; and Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada *

"5th International Biennial of Tapestry,"
Musée Cantonal des Beaux—Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland *

1973

"Contemporary Tapestries: The Hurschler Collection," Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, California *

"6th International Biennial of Tapestry,"
Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland *

"XII Biennale São Paolo Exposition 'Communication'" São Paolo, Brazil *

1975

"7th International Biennial of Tapestry," Musée Cantonal des Beaux–Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland *

"Tapisserie in Deutschland nach 1945," Städtische Kunstsammlungen, Ludwigshafen, Germany *

"Textile Objekte,"

Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin; Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg; Kunstgewerbemuseum, Overstolzenhaus, Cologne; Stadtmuseum, Munich; Museum für Kunsthandwerk, Frankfurt; and Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe, Germany*

"23. Jahresausstellung des Deutschen Künstlerbundes," Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund, Germany *

1976

"Fiber Structures,"

Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

"Fiber Works Europe and Japan,"

National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, and The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan *

1977

"8th International Biennial of Tapestry," Musée Cantonal des Beaux–Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland and Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal *

"25. Jahresausstellung des Deutschen Künstlerbundes," Karmeliterkloster, Frankfurt, Germany *

1978

"3rd Textile Triennale—Art Fabric and Industrial Textile—Lodz 78," Centralne Muzeum Wlokiennictwa, Lodz, Poland *

1979

"9th International Biennial of Tapestry," Musée Cantonal des Beaux–Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland and Nordjyllands Kunstmuseum, Aalborg, Denmark *

"Soft Art—Weich und Plastisch," Kunsthaus Zurich, Switzerland *

1080

"I. Triennale Fellbach, Kleinplastik in Deutschland," Schwabenlandhalle, Fellbach, Germany *

1981

"Dimension 81, Neue Tendenzen der Zeichnungen," Kunstverein Munich, Germany *

"10th International Biennial of Tapestry,"
Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland *

1082

"Natur-Landschaft-Kunst," Kunsthalle Bremen, Germany *

1983

"2. Triennale Fellbach, Kleinplastik in Deutschland," Schwabenlandhalle, Fellbach, Germany *

1984

"Dreidimensional—aktuelle Kunst aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," Kunsthalle Mannheim; Wilhelm–Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, Germany; and National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan *

"Kunstlandschaft Bundesrepublik," Kunstverein Frankfurt and Kunstverein Karlsruhe, Germany *

"Papierobjekte—eine neue künstlerische Sprache," Museum Bellerive, Zurich, Switzerland

1985

"12th International Biennial of Tapestry," Musée Cantonal des Beaux—Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland *

"Visages Contemporains de la Sculpture en Europe," Musee de Maubeuge, France *

"Zeichnung,"

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Germany *

1986

"Biennale der Papierkunst," Leopold-Hösch-Museum, Duren, Germany *

"Connections: An Exhibition of the Three Rivers Art Festival," Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

1987

"Jahresausstellung des Deutschen Künstlerbundes," Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, Germany *

"Künstlerbund Baden–Württemberg," Kunstverein Stuttgart, Germany *

"13th International Biennial of Tapestry," Musée Cantonal des Beaux–Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland *

1988

"Octobre des Arts," Musee Municipale, Lyon, France *

1989

"14th International Biennial of Tapestry," Musée Cantonal des Beaux–Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland *

"Papierkunst," Tempelhof, Berlin, Germany *

1990

"5. Triennale Zeitgenössisches Deutsches Kunsthandwerk," Museum für Kunsthandwerk, Frankfurt, Germany *

1992

"Crossing Borders," Kunstforening Bergen, Norway *

"Intimate and Intense,"

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota *

"Zeichnung," Wilhelmshöhe, Ettlingen, Germany *

1993

"Künstlerbund Baden–Württemberg," Kunstverein Heidelberg, Germany *

"Werkstoff Papier," Kunstverein Villingen–Schwenningen, Germany *

1994

"In Touch: International Crafts,"
Olympic Culturfestival and Maihaugen,
De Sandwigske Samlinger, Lillehammer, Norway *

Exhibition Checklist

Textiles	Models	11.
		Untitled (Drawing for Transilvania
1.	6.	tapestry series)
La Derniere de Cette Serie	Aluminum Schraffur	1973
1987	1986	Color pencil on paper
Goat hair	Cardboard and wood	22 x 27 cm (8 5/8" x 10 5/8")
4.50 X 7.50 m (14'9" X 24'7")	53 x 60 x 23 cm (20 7/8" x 23 5/8" x 9")	
		12.
2.	7⋅	Untitled
Fly South	Big Balance	1974
1993	1991	Pencil on paper
Coconut fiber, cotton, and paint	Aluminum and paper	30 x 40 cm (11 7/8" x 15 3/4")
2.20 X 3.60 X 0.25 m	60 x 80 x 20 cm	
(7'2 5/8" x 11'10" x 10")	(23 5/8" x 31 1/2" x 7 7/8")	13.
		Untitled (Collage)
3.	8.	1983
Monocline	Relief	Acrylic, paper, and mixed media
1993	1989	35 X 40 cm (13 3/4" X 15 3/4")
Coconut fiber, cotton, and paint	Paper	
2.20 X 2.20 X 0.40 M	50 X 35 X 12 cm	14.
(7'2 5/8" x 7'2 5/8" x 1'3 3/4")	(19 5/8" x 13 3/4" x 4 3/4")	Entwurfszeichnung II
		1985
4.	9.	Charcoal on paper
Relief	Model	100 x 130 cm (39 3/8" x 51 1/4")
1989	1992	
Coconut fiber and cotton	Cardboard and acrylic	I 5.
4.50 x 8.00 x 0.30 m	18 x 15 x 7 cm	Untitled
(14'9" x 26'3" x 11 7/8")	(7 1/8" x 5 3/4" x 2 3/4")	1988
		Charcoal on paper
5.	Drawings and Collages	100 x 130 cm (39 3/8" x 51 1/4")
Relief		
1990	IO.	16.
Coconut fiber, cotton, and paint	Balance	Untitled
2.00 X 2.40 X 0.10 m	1991	1988
(6'7" x 7'11" x 3 7/8")	Charcoal, sandpaper, and acrylic	Charcoal on paper with plastic rods
	on cardboard	225 X 275 X 90 CM
	70 x 90 cm (27 1/2" x 35 3/8")	(88 1/2" x 108" x 35 3/8")
		333. /

Dimensions are given in meters, centimeters, feet, and inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

1989	1991	1992
Graphite on paper	Charcoal on paper	Charcoal on paper
60 x 27 cm (23 5/8" x 10 5/8")	32 X 32 cm (12 5/8" X 12 5/8")	60 x 70 cm (23 5/8" x 27 1/2")
18.	23.	28.
Untitled	Untitled	Untitled
1989	1991	1992
Graphite on paper	Charcoal on paper	Acrylic and charcoal on paper
32 x 32 cm (12 5/8" x 12 5/8")	32 X 32 cm (12 5/8" X 12 5/8")	25 X 24 cm (9 7/8" X 9 1/2")
19.	24.	29.
Untitled	Untitled	Untitled (Collage)
1991	1991	1992
Charcoal on paper	Charcoal on paper	Charcoal and cardboard

32 x 32 cm (12 5/8" x 12 5/8")

22.

Untitled

17.

Untitled (Drawing for Relief)

100 X 125 cm (39 3/8" X 49 1/4")

27.

Untitled

25 x 25 cm (9 7/8" x 9 7/8")

20.	25.	30.
Untitled	Untitled	Untitled (Collage)
1991	1991	1993
Charcoal on paper	Charcoal on paper	Steel, paper, and charcoal
100 X 125 cm (39 3/8" X 49 1/4")	32 x 32 cm (12 5/8" x 12 5/8")	70 x 90 cm (27 1/2" x 35 3/8")

21.	26.	31.
Untitled (Collage)	Untitled	Untitled (Collage)
1991	1991	1991
Paper and graphite	Acrylic on paper	Paper and graphite
22 x 32 cm (8 5/8" x 12 5/8")	13 x 17 cm (5 1/8" x 6 3/4")	22 X 32 cm (8 5/8 X 12 5/8")

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